



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council issues unanimous support for Navajo veterans bill

WINDOW ROCK – Prior to recessing on the second day of the Winter Council Session on Tuesday evening, the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved Legislation No. 0191-17, which seeks final approval from the president to increase the funding available for direct services each year for Navajo veterans through the Veterans Trust Fund.

The Council created the Veterans Trust Fund in 1998 to fund services for Navajo veterans and also to reinvest a portion of the annual set-aside into the principal to grow the trust fund. The annual set-aside is obtained from the Navajo Nation's annual revenues, meaning that the current policy allows for four-percent of the overall revenues to be set-aside for the trust fund each year.

The legislation approved by the Council on Tuesday would increase the four-percent set-aside by adding new language to Title 12 of the Navajo Nation Code, stating that 75-percent of the total annual income earned, plus the current projected set-aside of the trust fund would be used as supplemental funding for programs and services to benefit veterans on an annual basis.

Furthermore, the fund's income earned at the end of the previous audited fiscal year plus the current fiscal year projected set-aside will be used to determine the allowable expenditure. The excess of the fund income over expenditures shall be reinvested in the trust fund to cover the rate of inflation and to provide or reasonable fund growth.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) said the new language would clearly define the amount of funding that would be available for veteran services each year, without overspending or having to use funding from the trust fund principal. He added that the funding would help Navajo veterans with housing improvements, stipends for food, assistance with hardships, and other services.

Following the Council's approval of the legislation, Delegate Damon thanked the various veteran organizations and individuals who helped develop and advocate for the changes to the trust fund.

"The Navajo Nation Council has been working on this for almost a year and three months. Tonight, we send a message across the street to the president, the vice president, and to the Navajo Nation veterans out there across the world, that the Navajo Nation Council supports [Navajo veterans] in your endless efforts in what you do for our country and for our Nation. I can

honestly say it's been a privilege and an honor to help assist in this process. With that my colleagues I say from the bottom of my heart, thank you for taking a stance with our Navajo veterans tonight."

Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) also conveyed his appreciation to the veterans who helped develop the legislation and to the dozens of veterans who were seated in the audience in the Council Chamber to support the bill.

"It's been a long journey. I want to thank all of our veterans for their consistency and for staying the course to get this done," stated Delegate Chee, who was the sponsor of a bill in December to override President Russell Begaye's veto of the Veterans Trust Fund Income Act – a separate legislation that was approved by the Council to clarify specific definitions within the Navajo Nation Code that guide the administration of the Veterans Trust Fund.

President Begaye vetoed the Veterans Trust Fund Income Act on Nov. 6, 2017, which was then overridden by the Council on Dec. 22 with a unanimous vote of 22-0.

Council members have continuously urged President Begaye to approve Legislation No. 0191-17, adding that the Council will once again seek an override if the resolution is vetoed. Included with the legislation are supporting resolutions from each of the five Navajo agency veteran organizations and various chapter organizations.

On Tuesday, the Council approved Legislation No. 0191-17 with a vote of 21-0. President Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the resolution once it is delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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